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TAGS: PHUM KIRF PREL CH VT
SUBJECT: BEIJING SILENT ON VATICAN TALKS; ADDITIONAL
ORDINATIONS ON HOLD PENDING RESULTS

REF: A. BEIJING 13676

1B. BEIJING 9291

Classified By: Ambassador Clark T. Randt, Jr. Reasons: 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) Officials of China's Foreign Ministry, State Administration for Religious Affairs and Catholic Patriotic Association all denied knowledge of any Vatican delegation in Beijing for talks concerning relations between China and the Holy See. American NGO activist John Kamm told the Ambassador that China had planned to ordain 30 new bishops but put the plans on hold pending the result of the current visit by Archbishop Celli. Celli's visit would mark fulfillment of one of China's promises to the USG in connection with President Hu's visit to Washington.

2. (C) Separately, an official overseeing religious affairs told us that for the first time since the Communists took power, the Government in May notified the Vatican about a list of names it proposed to elevate to bishop. The Vatican did not respond. When the Vatican then criticized the ordinations, the Chinese were angry, he said. End Summary.

3. (C) Officials from MFA, SARA and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association recently told Poloff that they were unaware of any talks in Beijing with representatives of the Vatican. As noted ref A, the MFA press spokeswoman June 27 denied knowledge of any such talks. Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) Vice President Liu Bainian told Poloff he highly doubted an official Vatican delegation was in Beijing because such talks are premature. SARA Foreign Affairs official Liu Jinguang said no official visit was taking place, but let on that sometimes Catholic figures traveled to China in their individual capacity and took advantage of the occasion to learn about the religious situation in China.

Ordination of Bishops A Hot Topic

4. (C) In a June 29 telephone conversation with the Ambassador, NGO activist John Kamm said he understood that the Chinese had made plans to ordain 30 new bishops, but that they had put those plans on hold pending the outcome of Archbishop Celli's visit. The planned ordinations would have gone forward without consultation with the Holy See, making more difficult any improvement in relations, according to the information Kamm said he received from sources within China.

5. (C) The Chinese religious affairs officials we spoke with denied plans to ordain more bishops in the near future. But they acknowledged anger over the Vatican's handling of the

May conflict in which China ordained four new bishops, two of whom were not approved by the Holy See (ref b).

Historic First: Chinese Prenotified Vatican

¶6. (C) SARA's Liu said China had, for the first time since 1949 (when the Communists took power), reported to the Vatican the names of the bishops it intended to ordain. He claimed that the Vatican failed to appreciate the significance of this gesture and, to China's surprise, failed to respond to this notice. Only after the public ordinations took place without a Vatican comment did the Vatican announce that the bishops involved in the illicit ordinations could be excommunicated, he claimed. China took that reaction as a slap in the face, SARA's Liu said. As noted ref B, the CPA's Liu said China has more than 40 dioceses without a bishop, making the need to resolve the ordination question acute. He denied any plans to conduct further ordinations in the near future.

RANDT